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A LETTER FROM NEW MADRID 1789

BY
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Frederick, New Madrid



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The letter from New Madrid of April 14, 1789, is here reprinted from the text as it appears in the *Virginia Gazette* and *Weekly Advertiser* of August 27, 1789. In Houck's *History of Missouri*, 2:112-115, extracts are printed from a joint letter of Major McCully, Colonel Shreve, Colonel Christopher Hays, Captain Light, Captain Taylor, John Dodge, David Rankin, John Ward, John Stewart, James Rhea, Captain Hewling and others, addressed to Dr. John Morgan of Philadelphia, dated New Madrid, April 14, 1789. Houck says this was published in Philadelphia, but gives no reference; he thinks that it was this letter which led Madison to write to Washington that it "contained the most authentic and precise evidence of the Spanish project that has come to my knowledge." From the evidence it appears, however, that it was the circular of Morgan, issued in the fall of 1788, calling for settlers, which was the subject of Madison's statement to Washington. The circular is printed in full in Hunt's *Madison*, 5:331, in connection with the letter to Washington on March 26, 1789. The extracts from the New Madrid letter as printed by Houck do not agree in all respects with the corresponding passages in the letter printed in the *Virginia Gazette*. For this reason, and also because there are important parts not printed at all by Houck, it seems desirable to reprint the text in full from the *Virginia Gazette*. For some of the numerous references to George Morgan see "Life of George Morgan" in the Washington (Pa.) *Observer*, May 21, 1904, by Julia Morgan Harding; Alvord's *Kaskaskia records*, 1778-1790, p. 3; *Calendar of Virginia state papers*, v. 4, p. 554, 555; J. H. Baussman's *History of Beaver county, Pa.*, v. 1, p. 67, 67, with portrait; Houck's *History of Missouri*, v. 2, p. 109 ff.; C. E. Carter's *Great Britain in the Illinois country*, 1763-1774, index. There is a description of Morganza, the home of Morgan, in Thwaites' edition of Cuming's *Tour to the west*, p. 240.

E. G. SWEM

Pittsburgh, August 1.

To Messrs. Bedford and Turnbull, Pittsburg.

New-Madrid, April 14, 1789.

Gentlemen,

The inclemency of the season, and the precautions necessary for the advantage and security of our party and enterprize, rendered our voy-

age down the Ohio long, though not a disagreeable one. We have now been in the Mississippi two months, most of which time has been taken up in visiting the lands from Cape St. Comme, on the north, to this place on the south, and westward to the river St. Francois, the general course of which is parallel with the Mississippi, and from twenty to thirty miles distance.

Colonel Morgan, with 19 others, undertook to reconnoitre the lands above, or north of the Ohio; this gave him the earliest possible opportunity of producing his credentials to Don Manuel Peres, governor of the Illinois, who treated him and those who accompanied him with the greatest possible politeness; and their arrival, after their business was known, created a general joy throughout the country, among all ranks of its inhabitants. Even the neighboring Indians have expressed the greatest pleasure on our arrival, and intentions of settlement.

There is not a single nation or tribe of indians who claims or pretend to claim, a foot of land granted to Colonel Morgan. This is a grand matter in favour of our settlement.

The governor very cheerfully supplied our party with every necessary demanded by Colonel Morgan, and particularly with horses and guides to reconnoitre all the lands to the western limits, and from north to south, in the interior country.

In an undertaking of this nature, it is not to be doubted, but different opinions have prevailed amongst us in regard to the most advantageous situation where was best to establish the first settlement of farmers and planters. A considerable number of reputable French families on the American side of the Illinois, who propose to join us, wished to influence our judgments in favour of a very beautiful situation and country about twelve leagues above the Ohio. A number of American farmers, deputed from Post St. Vincents, and some others of our party, were delighted with the country opposite the Ohio, one league back from the river, to which there is access by a rivulet, which empties itself into the Mississippi about two and a half, or three miles above the Ohio. Some declared for a situation and very fine country, to which there is a good landing at the highest floods and about nine miles below the Ohio; but after maturely considering every circumstance, and examining the country in this neighbourhood fully, we have united in the resolution to establish our new city, from whence this letter is dated, about twelve leagues below the Ohio, at a place formerly called Lancee La Graise, or the Greasy Bend, below the mouth of a river, marked in Captain Huteh-in's map Cheyousea or Sound river.

Here the banks of the Mississippi, for a considerable length, are high, dry, and pleasant, and the soil westward to the river St. Francois, is of the most desirable quality for Indian corn, tobacco, flax, cotton, hemp,

and indigo, though thought by some too rich for wheat; insomuch, that we verily believe that there is not an acre of it uncultivable, or even indifferent land, within a thousand square miles.

The country rises gradually from the Mississippi into fine, dry, pleasant and healthful grounds, superior, we believe, in beauty and in quality, to every other part of America.

The limits of our new city of Madrid are to extend four miles south down the river, and two miles west from it, so as to cross a beautiful deep lake, of the purest spring water, 100 yards wide, and several leagues in length north and south, and emptying itself by a constant narrow stream through the center of the city. The banks of this lake, which is called St. Ann's, are high, dry and pleasant: The water deep, clear, and sweet, the bottom a clean sand, free from wood, shrubs, or other vegetables, and well stored with fish.

On each side of this delightful lake, streets are to be laid out 100 feet wide, and a road to be continued round it of the same breadth, and the trees are directed to be preserved for ever, for the health and pleasure of its citizens.

A street 120 feet wide on the banks of the Mississippi is laid out, and the trees are directed to be preserved for the same purpose.

Twelve acres in a central part of the city are to be served in the like manner, and be ornamented, improved, and regulated by the magistracy of the city for public walks, and forty lots of half an acre each, are appropriated to such public use as the citizens shall recommend, or the chief-magistrate direct; and one lot of twelve acres is to be reserved for the king's use. One city lot of half an acre, and one lot of five acres, to be a very free gift to each of the 600 first settlers.

Our surveyors are now engaged in laying out the city and outlots upon this extensive and approved plan, and in surveying the country into farms of 320 acres each, previous to individuals making any choice or settlement.

These farms, and the conditions of settlement being also upon a plan universally satisfactory, will prevent the endless law-suits which different modes in other countries have established, and entailed upon the posterity of the first settlers.

We have built cabins, and a magazine for provisions, &c. and are proceeding to make gardens, and to plough and plant 100 acres of the finest prairies land in the world with Indian corn, some hemp, flax, cotton, tobacco, and potatoes.

The timber here differ in some instances from what you have in the middle states of America; yet we have white oaks of an extraordinary great size, tall and straight; also black oaks, mulbury, ash, poplar, parsimons, crab apple in abundance, and larger than ever we saw before,

hickory, walnut, locust, and sassafras trees of an extraordinary length and straightness, are common of 24 inches diameter.

The underwood is principally cane and spice. — The timber unknown to you are cypress, paeon, coffee, cucumber, and some others. The cypress grows on the low land along the river, and is equal in quality to white cedar.

We have a fine tract of this in our neighbourhood, which Colonel Morgan has directed to be surveyed into lots of a suitable size, to accommodate every farm.

We are pleased with the climate, and have reason to flatter ourselves that we have at last found a country equal to our most sanguine wishes.

Several principal French gentlemen at St. Gennieve has offered to conduct Colonel Morgan, or any person he pleases to send, to as fine iron and lead mines as any in America, within a short day's journey of the Mississippi, and within the bounds of his territory.

It is intended to preserve these for some person or persons of sufficient capital and knowledge to undertake to work them.

Salt springs are said to be dispersed through all the country; as we have this information from the best authority we believe it, but have not visited any.

The banks of the Mississippi for many leagues in extent, commencing 20 odd miles above the Ohio, are a continued chain of limestone; but we have not yet found any in this neighbourhood.

We would mention many other particulars which would be pleasing to our friends, but this would require more time to write a copy, than we can spare from our other necessary employments. We however, add, that a thousand farms are directed to be surveyed, which will soon be executed, for the immediate choice and settlement of all families who shall come here next fall, and that the months of September, October, November, December, and January, are the most proper to arrive here, as the farmers can begin to plough in February, and continue that work until Christmas.

After the surveys are compleated, Colonel Morgan and Major M'Cully will proceed to New York, via New-Orleans and Cuba; and Colonel Shreeve, Captain Light and Captain Taylor, with all others who conclude to return immediately for their families, will ascend the Ohio, in time to leave Fort Pitt again for this place in October.

Captain Huling undertakes the direction of a number of single men to plant one hundred acres of Indian corn, some tobacco, cotton, flax and hemp. Colonel Morgan has supplied him with horses and ploughs, &c. He will be able to build a good house and mill against his father and brothers arrival here next fall.

As not a single person of our whole party, consisting of seventy men,

has been sick an hour, nor met with any accident, but on the contrary all enjoy perfect health, and are in high spirits on the discovery of this happy clime and country, we think it needless to mention the name of any one in particular.

We are, Sirs,

Your most obedient servants,

(Signed)	David Rankin,
George M'Cully,	John Ward,
John Dodge,	John Stewart,
Peter Light,	James Rhea.
A true copy,	

Samuel Sellman, jun.

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